

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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INSIDE

Local

WEATHER FORECAST

PICTURE TIME: 2:25 A.M., DECEMBER 17, 2003
Western North Pacific between Equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A monsoon trough extends from 6N130E through a tropical disturbance near 8N145E and finally to near 5N160E. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms associated with the disturbance are found in the Mariana islands as well as between Yap and Chuuk or between 4N and 16N from 139E to 153E. Just east of the monsoon trough, a surface trough of low pressure continues to near the equator at 168E. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are developing north and east of the trough or within 100 miles either side of a line from 9N160E to the equator at 173E, including Kosrae. Trade-wind convergence is producing scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms across portions of the Marshall islands, between 4N and 16N from 170E to 180.



SAIPAN AND TINIAN

Cloudy and breezy with scattered showers, some locally heavy, and a slight chance of thunderstorms.

Winds: East at 20-25 mph. Gusting in 35 mph in showers.

Temperature: Lows near 78. Highs near 86.



GUAM AND ROTA

Cloudy and breezy with scattered showers, some locally heavy, and a slight chance of thunderstorms.

Winds: East at 20-25 mph. Gusting in 35 mph in showers.

Temperature: Lows near 78. Highs near 86.



PALAU

Partly cloudy with isolated showers.

Winds: Northeast at 10 kt.



POHNPEI

Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.

Winds: East at 10 kt.



YAP AND ULITHI

Partly cloudy with isolated showers.

Winds: Northeast at 10 kt.



KOSRAE

Partly cloudy with isolated showers.

Winds: Southeast at 10 kt.



CHUUK

Mostly cloudy with scattered showers with a slight chance of thunderstorms.

Winds: Northeast at 10-15 kt.



MAJURO

Mostly cloudy with scattered showers and a slight chance of thunderstorms.

Winds: East at 10-15 kt.

CITY	FORECAST	HIGH	LOW
Auckland	Cloudy	61F (16C)	49F (9C)
Beijing	Sunny	44F (7C)	26F (-3C)
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	74F (23C)	61F (16C)
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	86F (30C)	72F (22C)
London, England	Cloudy	56F (13C)	45F (7C)
Los Angeles	Cloudy	69F (21C)	51F (11C)
Manila	Cloudy	88F (31C)	71F (22C)
Melbourne	Sunny	73F (23C)	54F (12C)
Miami	Partly Cloudy	84F (29C)	75F (24C)
New York, NY	Cloudy	52F (11C)	48F (9C)
Osaka	Rain	54F (12C)	46F (8C)
Paris	Cloudy	53F (12C)	41F (5C)
Pusan	Rain	58F (14C)	43F (6C)
Rome	Partly Cloudy	55F (13C)	39F (4C)
Salem, Oregon	Rain	54F (12C)	38F (3C)
San Francisco	Sunny	64F (18C)	47F (5C)
Seoul	Rain	52F (11C)	45F (7C)
Tokyo	Rain	55F (13C)	49F (9C)
Washington, DC	Cloudy	60F (16C)	48F (9C)

Guerrero: Yangetmai has the right to question Teacher Rep poll result

Board of Education member Herman Guerrero commented yesterday that Marianas High School teacher James Yangetmai has the prerogative to question the results of the recently concluded Teacher Representative election, which the Association of Commonwealth Teacher candidate lost to Kagman High School teacher



Guerrero

Ambrose Bennett.

"Anyone [who] is running can always question [the election result]. I think they [administration] need to ensure whether he has valid points or not. If it's not valid, then at least you settle the issue. And there's no cloud hanging over the whole process."

"It's a democratic process. People who lose sometimes ask or think there are discrepancies or procedures [that were] not followed. If that is the case then the people that are conducting the election needs to refute them and say that this is what we did, and this the process and the procedures," said the official, who recently lost the BOE chairmanship to Roman Benavente.

Yangetmai, who lagged behind Bennett by 16 votes in Monday's poll, hinted of possible vote manipulation, casting

DEQ heightens illegal dumping campaign

The Division of Environmental Quality warned that it would impose a fine on anyone caught illegally dumping trash on the islands.

DEQ director John I. Castro Jr. urged the public to respect the no littering signs the agency has installed at beach parks and other areas.

"We will assess a fine. Our regulations allow us to impose up to \$25,000 per day of violation," Castro said.

The DEQ hopes that the move will deter the public from illegally disposing of trash and household wastes.

Castro said trash should be disposed of at the Lower Base

doubts on the election's credibility. ACT claimed the process was not valid and fair, as it allegedly lacked transparency.

The group raised the absence of its own representative at the polling center.

"I guess in any election, there's a need to be clear on the process and procedures. If the one who lost is questioning the

validity of the election then perhaps they need to revisit [the issue] and make sure there's no doubt that what they certified is true and correct. The process has to be followed and it has to be transparent so nobody can question it," insisted Guerrero, who called on House legislators yesterday.

The BOE member representing Saipan was also curious over the dismal turnout in Monday's election.

"When you only have 28 percent [of] eligible voters voting, that's an extremely low turnout. With this kind of turnout, there's no clear mandate from the teachers. So it's questionable. One can raise the question why you don't have many who voted? There's a lot of questions why," he asserted.

Gov. Juan N. Babauta proclaimed Bennett's victory on Tuesday, a day after the Teacher Representative poll was held here Monday and simultaneously on Rota and Tinian.

The chief executive stressed that teacher representation in the BOE is constitutionally mandated. He said that concerns raised over the selection has prompted his office to hold the election so that all public school teachers in the CNMI could choose a representative that would truly represent them.

Babauta credited the Public School System, the BOE, the

PSS legal counsel, the Attorney General's Office and the administration for putting together a fair and objective selection process.

Of the 500 full-time teachers who were eligible to vote, Babauta confirmed that only 142 teachers or 28 percent cast their votes. He lamented the minimal participation.

According to the breakdown, Yangetmai garnered 62 votes while Bennett gained 78 votes. Two ballots were reportedly cast without votes.

Babauta explained that only full time teachers were eligible to vote in this election, quoting PSS' definition of full time teachers as any person who is employed by the Public School System and has the primary responsibility for the education, instruction or provides related services for one or more students. *(Marian A. Maraya)*

Paras signs payment schedule with CHC

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Paras Enterprises president Juan T. Guerrero has signed a payment schedule agreement with the Department of Public Health only last week.

Earlier, Paras legal counsel Mark Smith clarified that no agreement had been reached yet as of Jan. 8 as previously agreed by both parties.

Guerrero said yesterday that Paras signed the payment schedule only last Jan. 14. On January 16, he said Paras received an additional \$100,000 payment from DPH.

Based on the schedule, the department will give another payment of \$80,000 to Paras on Jan. 30 and some \$50,000 on Feb. 13.

Guerrero said Paras and DPH continue to negotiate for the \$50,000 billing.

"We have submitted our billing for \$50,000. I don't know why they're disputing our billing now when in the last six years,

they never did," said Guerrero. He said Paras submitted \$248,000 billing to DPH as of Jan. 7, 2004.

Based on the schedule, the DPH only acknowledged some \$230,000.

"There is some flexibility but we'll still pursue what is really due us," said Guerrero, adding that the department itself is charging Paras some \$11,000 for outstanding hospital bills.

This amount would be assessed against the last payment to Paras.

"We'll settle that but I'm not really sure how much we owe them so we have to discuss that," he said.

Guerrero also clarified that he has not signed any expiration transfer agreement with the department, which would "legalize" the transfer of Paras employees to the Commonwealth Health Center.

Some authorities, however, said that a consensual transfer agreement with Paras is no longer needed

since its contracts with employees provide that their termination of employment goes with Paras' contract termination with CHC.

Both parties have agreed to finalize their payment schedule in view of the DPH's shift to direct hiring of nursing staff effective Jan. 1, 2004.

Paras and other agencies' contracts with CHC ended on Dec. 31, 2003 but transfer negotiations dragged along pending the settlement of the government's debt with the companies and the lack of funded FTEs or positions at the department.

On Jan. 2, Finance released \$100,000 each to Paras and Saipan Employment Agency Services as partial payment.

The government terminated its contracts with agencies on the belief that direct hiring would result in better delivery of health care and boost employee morale.

The direct hiring aims to implement a uniform pay for all nursing staff.

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Opinion

Saipan Tribune

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EDITORIAL



3 men arrested for alleged assault

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

Authorities arrested Monday night three men who have been a subject of intensive investigations by law enforcers since November 2003 when a 43-year-old man lodged a complaint against them.

Police department spokesperson Sgt. Tom Blas Jr. said Martin F. Borja, 38; Chris W. Taimanglo, 20; and William M. Faisao, 19, were arrested based on the arrest warrants issued against them by Judge Juan Lizama.

Blas said COPPS officers Jesse Seman and Sandy Hambrus arrested the three suspects in connection with a Nov. 16, 2003, assault case lodged by Saburo Stewart, 43.

Lizama issued the warrants after the police released the results of its investigation on the case. The officers immediately served the warrants to the suspects. All three were brought to the Adult Correctional facility in Susupe where they were booked and detained pending bail hearing.

The investigation report showed that the police department received a call for assistance around 1:28am of Nov. 16, 2003, due to a disturbance in the house of Stewart in Kagman III area. Medics were also dispatched due to injuries sustained by the victim.

According to the report, the victim and two of the three suspects were involved in a fight outside the victim's house. During the squabble, the suspects used rocks, a machete, and a baseball bat to allegedly attack the victim, causing serious injuries.

Stewart reportedly sustained lacerations on the back, legs, and arms, as well as other cuts and bruises on his body.

After the investigation, probbers determined the culpability of the three suspects and asked that arrest warrants be issued against them.

The suspects are now facing disturbing the peace, assault and battery, assault with dangerous weapons, and criminal mischief charges.

Taiwanese boat seized off New Caledonia

A Taiwanese fishing boat has been intercepted south of New Caledonia for fishing illegally.

The French high commission in the New Caledonia capitol of Noumea says the ship had been spotted by a French surveillance aircraft and an inspection showed it carried dozens of tons of fresh and frozen fish.

The interception comes just days after the captain of another Taiwanese fishing boat was jailed for six months and fined almost US\$200,000 for fishing illegally. (RNZI/PIR)



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION

Saipan Southern High School students gather around Gov. Juan N. Babauta during the chief executive's recent visit at the campus, in line with the administration's education program. Babauta has been putting emphasis on public education as an important tool in the eventual recovery of the local economy.

MPLA board in limbo due to lack of quorum

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The lack of a quorum on the Board of Directors of the Marianas Public Lands Authority is stymieing efforts to move ahead on critical projects, including 36 new offers for land compensation that require the board's approval.

Only two members remain on the Board—chairperson, Ana Demapan-Castro and vice chairman Manny Villagomez—following the resignation of a member and term expiration of another.

Member Pedro M. Atalig resigned from the board effective Jan. 1, 2004, while member

Pedro Igitol's term expired on Dec. 31, 2003.

The board is composed of five seats, with one representative each from Tinian and Rota and three from Saipan. The CNMI Constitution also provides that one of the directors should be of Carolinian descent, while another should represent women.

At the moment, Demapan-Castro represents Saipan and the women's sector, while Villagomez represents Tinian. This means nobody is representing Rota, the Carolinians, and two seats for Saipan.

This, even as the MPLA has already readied 36 new offers for land compensation that re-

quire the board's approval.

"We have to get the board's approval before we can make the offer but the board can't possibly meet right now for lack of quorum," said MPLA commis-

sioner Henry S. Hofschneider.

The board normally holds a regular meeting on the third Thursday of the month.

Hofschneider said that some names have been floated for appointment by the governor to the board. He declined to identify them.

Meantime, he said that 38 landowners have accepted the MPLA's initial offers and are like likely to get their compensation within the month.

"Once Finance puts the

money in MPLA's special account, we can start cutting checks," he said.

Hofschneider said that MPLA is offering "just and fair" compensation to landowners.

The MPLA board approved 75 folders for immediate land compensation last month. This came soon after the CNMI government floated a \$40-million bond, with the proceeds to be used primarily to settle the longstanding land claims by individuals against the government. The first batch of claims included acquisition of rights-of-way.

The Land Compensation Act mandates the government to prioritize the payment for lands used for rights-of-way,

then ponding basins, and later wetlands and other claims.

The payment to landowners is based on the valuation at the time of taking by the Commonwealth.

The MPLA has listed some 120 eligible land claimants in the CNMI.

Of the \$40-million bond, only about \$27 million will be used for land compensation, as \$11 million has been allotted to fund a pending prison project. The bond's Hawaii-based underwriter also deducted \$1.5 million from the total amount for cost of the bond issuance.

The government is given 30 years to pay off the loan at an annual interest of 6.75 percent.

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Business

Simple steps for improving financial health

By EILEEN AMBROSE

THE BALTIMORE SUN

A perennial New Year's resolution is to get finances in shape.

But finances—which include taxes, credit cards, estate planning and investing—can be overwhelming. It's not surprising that financial resolve often quickly falls to the wayside, along with popular resolutions to exercise and lose weight.

That doesn't have to be the case.

"You don't have to do it all at once," advised Harold Evensky, a financial planner in Coral Gables, Fla.

You can start with small steps, Evensky said. "Any beginning is a good beginning," he said.

So, here are a dozen simple financial steps—one for each month—that experts say can put you in better financial shape by year-end:

□ January: You acquire a 401(k), a couple of individual retirement accounts and some individual stocks and mutual funds, and pretty soon your portfolio is stuffed with all sorts of things.

"No one knows what they've got," said Mari Adam, a financial planner in Boca Raton, Fla.

Take this month to look at your holdings, and figure your asset allocation, or what percentage of your portfolio is in stocks, bonds and cash, Adam suggested. If you've never done this, you may find that your allocation is too aggressive or too conservative to meet your goals, and needs adjusting.

□ February: The limit on how much can be salted away in a 401(k) goes up this year by \$1,000 to \$13,000. Workers 50 and older can contribute an extra \$3,000, for a total of \$16,000.

Check with your employer to make sure you have increased your contributions, experts said. If the new limits seem too steep, try increasing your contributions by 1 percentage point, said Don Blandin, president of the American Savings Educa-

tion Council.

And, of course, if you're not participating in your employer's plan, sign up.

□ March: With the tax deadline nearing, it's a good time to organize your financial records. "Everybody has messy files," said J. Michael Martin, a financial planner in Columbia, Md.

How long do you keep tax records? The Internal Revenue Service generally audits returns within three years of filing, although it can go back further if there's a suspicion of fraud or under-reported income, Martin said. "Keep things seven years and you should be home free," Martin said.

□ April: Boost retirement savings. You have until April 15 to make a contribution to an IRA for 2003.

□ May: If you get hefty tax refunds year after year, it's time to adjust your Form W-4, which determines the amount of money your employer takes out each paycheck for taxes. This will put more money in your pocket throughout the year, instead of Uncle Sam's. The IRS' Web site at www.irs.gov features a calculator to figure the right withholding for you.

□ June: Many people don't know if they are saving too much for retirement, too little or are right on target because they never made the calculation.

Figure your savings goal by using one of the many online retirement calculators, such as American Savings Education Council's Ballpark Estimate at www.asec.org.

□ July: Got card debt? Look for a lower credit card rate so you can pay off balances faster, said Gerri Detweiler, author of "The Ultimate Credit Handbook." Check out www.debtsmart.com for advice on lowering your interest rate, she said.

No debt? Then look for a card that offers rewards. Generally, if annual charges are less than \$10,000, look for a card that offers perks with no annual fee, Detweiler said. If you charge

more than that, then it may be worth the annual fee to earn frequent flier miles, she said.

□ August: Review property and casualty coverage, which includes car, homeowner's and umbrella policies.

Even if your homeowner's policy provides replacement coverage, you can easily be underinsured if housing and labor costs have skyrocketed in your area or you've done extensive remodeling, experts said.

Save on premiums by increasing low deductibles on auto policies. Drivers usually don't make small claims any-

way because they push up premiums, experts said.

□ September: Review estate documents to see if they're up to date, said Thomas Grzymala, a financial planner in Alexandria, Va. This year, for example, the amount an individual can shield from estate taxes rises \$500,000 to \$1.5 million, which may require changes in your documents or planning, he said.

Also, be sure beneficiaries and guardians are still correct, he said.

Estate documents—will, living will, financial and health-care powers of attorney—aren't just for the rich. If you don't

have these papers, get started in drawing them up, experts said.

□ October: Get copies of your credit report, advised Barry Glassman, a financial planner in McLean, Va.

They can reveal if you're a victim of identity theft, or remind you of open credit cards that are unused but can negatively affect your credit score, Glassman said. This score is used by lenders and others to set credit terms offered to you.

□ November: Sign up at work for a flexible spending account for next year and reduce your taxes, advised Joanne Hamil-

ton, an educator with Maryland Cooperative Extension.

Workers' money goes into the account pretax, and they can use the cash to pay medical expenses without ever having to pay taxes on it. "It's like the federal government is helping you pay your health-care costs," Hamilton said. It also lowers adjusted gross income, which could make you eligible for other income-based tax deductions.

□ December: Donate to charity any clothes that you haven't worn in the past two years, Glassman said. Your closets will be cleaner and you get a tax deduction on the donation.

Showdown on global currency policies expected in February

On Feb. 6, amid pressing concerns over the dollar's decline against the euro, finance ministers from the Group of Seven leading industrial countries will convene in Boca Raton, Fla., largely to decide whether currency intervention is finally needed.

To the Europeans, there is little question. The euro's strength has punished the continent's exporters and threatens the European Union's nascent economic recovery. Wary of Europe's fate, the Japanese have been snapping up dollars to prop up the yen, and that action has left the Europeans bearing the consequences of the United States' soaring budget and trade deficits.

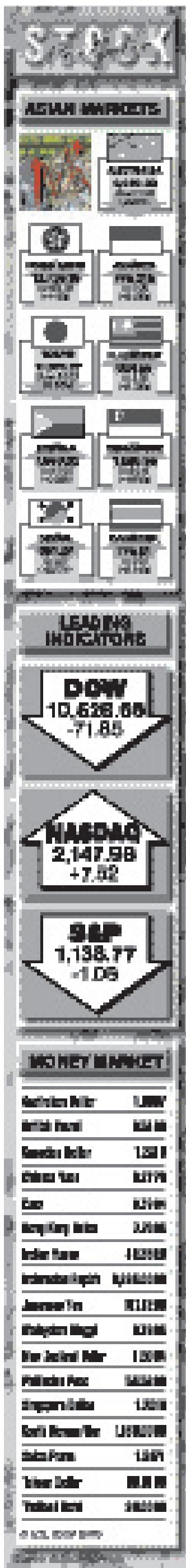
The EU would like to pressure Japan to let the yen rise. If investors eager to sell off dollar-denominated assets see an alternative currency to buy, that should take pressure off the euro. And most everyone at Boca would like to make clear they want currency "stability"—not "flexibility," as the Bush administration puts it. So far, the administration—benefiting from the surging exports and diminishing imports that the weak dollar has helped foster—is standing firm. And Treasury Secretary John Snow will be on his home turf.

But a prickly, behind-the-scenes showdown in Florida appears unavoidable. (*The Washington Post*)

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Stewart pleads innocent as trial starts

By ERIN McCLAM
AP WRITER

Martha Stewart waved to her supporters, strode into a Manhattan courthouse and repeated a plea of innocent at the formal start of her stock-trading trial Tuesday.

The 62-year-old millionaire gracious-living guru stood in court and nodded at the first batch of jurors, who were interviewed one by one in a judge's private robing room.

"Not guilty," Stewart said five times, speaking almost inaudibly and nodding as she re-entered her plea to five criminal counts related to her 2001 sale of nearly 4,000 shares of ImClone Systems.

Stewart, in a dark overcoat, clutched two bags as she stepped out of a black town car and said "Good morning" while passing a phalanx of cameras. She then climbed the courthouse steps and briefly waved to two fans standing in the freezing cold, including a man wearing a "Save Martha" chef's hat and matching apron.

In court, she produced a ballpoint pen and green stenographer's notebook and listened to U.S. District Judge Miriam Goldman Cedarbaum instruct the potential jurors on their role in the trial.

"Only you can determine what happened, and the verdict as to each count will be your decision alone," the judge said.

Cedarbaum told the potential jurors that opening statements will probably begin next week. The trial is expected to last into March.

Stewart faces 30 years in prison and penalties of \$1.25 million, although she would likely receive far less under federal sentencing guidelines if convicted.

Stewart is the highest-profile figure to stand trial since the government began its crackdown on corporate corruption two years ago.

She became the queen of home decor and amassed a fortune as the head of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, which stamped her style on everything from magazines and recipes to bed linens and bath



AP
Martha Stewart arrives at a New York federal courthouse Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2004, for her first appearance at her closely watched trial.

towels. Her legions of supporters argue she is being targeted because of her celebrity status.

"This is a witch hunt," said Linda Smith, who took a two-hour bus ride from New Jersey to stand outside the courthouse in support of Stewart. "Martha's public believes her, believes in her innocence."

The Imclone stock fell sharply the day after Stewart's sale on a negative government report about an Imclone cancer drug. Prosecutors say Stewart lied to investigators to cover up that her stock sale was prompted by a tip that Imclone founder Sam Waksal was trying to sell his shares after getting advance word of the report.

Stewart claims she and her stockbroker had a pre-existing order to sell ImClone stock when it fell to \$60 per share.

The broker, Peter Bacanovic also is charged with five criminal counts in the trial. Arriving in court after Stewart, he briefly leaned in to hug her and exchange kisses on the cheek.

Bacanovic, 41, also re-entered a plea of innocent to each count against him, clearly and emphatically repeating the phrase "not guilty." Bacanovic's five counts carry a total of 25 years and \$1.25 million.

Stewart and Bacanovic entered the same innocent pleas on June 4, the day they were indicted. They had to formally

re-enter them Tuesday because the government made last-minute changes to its indictment.

The jury selection process is routinely held in open court, but Cedarbaum closed it for this case, saying she was worried jurors might be less forthcoming with their answers if they knew reporters were in the room.

Instead, a transcript of each day's juror questioning will be provided to the press on the following day.

The first day was anticlimactic: After Stewart's entrance and the judge's instructions, potential jurors waited for hours as they were called individually for questioning. At least four potential jurors fell asleep.

In the MCA Financial case, the SEC said the auditors and firms knew that the mortgage-banking company based in Southfield, Mich., failed to disclose millions of dollars of third-party transactions and yet failed to take action and approved the statements. Their conduct contributed to company investors losing millions, the agency charged.

"In Grant Thornton's case, the firm rented out its name and prestige to the audit work of a smaller firm without taking adequate care to ensure that the audit was properly staffed and performed," Stephen Cutler, the SEC's enforcement director, said in a statement. "In Doeren Mayhew's case, the firm failed to ensure that the personnel assigned to the audit had the requisite expertise and acted with requisite care and skepticism."

In a statement, Chicago-based Grant Thornton said MCA had concealed its fraud and lied to the auditors.

"For 80 years, we have adhered to the highest standards of professionalism and we will vigorously defend ourselves against these charges," Grant Thornton said.

Roger Young, an attorney representing Troy, Mich.-based Doeren Mayhew, said the SEC was "dead wrong."

SEC alleges Grant Thornton aided fraud

By MARCY GORDON
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Federal regulators have alleged that big accounting firm Grant Thornton contributed to a company's fraudulent reporting by lending its name and prestige to the work of a smaller auditing firm without fully checking its accuracy.

The action by the Securities and Exchange Commission, announced Tuesday, also named the smaller firm, Doeren Mayhew & Co., two of its directors and a Grant Thornton partner in connection with the firms' audit of MCA Financial Corp.'s 1998 financial statements.

Both firms disputed the SEC's allegations and said they would defend themselves in the agency's administrative proceeding.

An administrative law judge at the SEC, who will hear the case, could order the firms or the individuals to repay allegedly ill-gotten gains.

Suspension from auditing publicly traded companies is another possible penalty, although that would be a rare move.

Last May, the SEC sought to suspend Ernst & Young from accepting new corporate clients for six months because of its alleged failure to remain completely independent from companies whose books it audits. That case is still pending before a law judge.

It was the first time the agency had sought suspension of a major accounting firm since 1975.

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Dow ends down 72 as Nasdaq gains 8

By MICHAEL J. MARTINEZ
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Investors intent on collecting profits from Friday's big gains looked past a series of positive earnings reports Tuesday, sending blue chip stocks moderately lower. The falling dollar and rising price of oil contributed to the selling.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 71.85, or 0.7 percent, at 10,528.66. Broader stock indicators were mixed. The Standard & Poor's 500 index was down 1.06, or 0.1 percent, at 1,138.77, while the Nasdaq composite index closed up 7.52, or 0.4 percent, at 2,147.98.

"This is the classic 'buy the rumor, sell the news' market," said Russ Koesterich, U.S. equity strategist for State Street Corp. "A lot of the stocks that reported today have already had huge runs. They beat estimates, yes, but not so much that they're being bid higher."

Tuesday's selling could foreshadow the next few weeks, even as most analysts expect total quarterly earnings to rise 20 percent over last year, according to Michael Murphy, head trader at Wachovia Securities in Baltimore.

While earnings were foremost on investors' minds, the rising price of oil and a continuing slide

in the dollar entered into some sellers' thoughts, according to Scott Wren, equity strategist for A.G. Edwards & Sons.

Prices for light, sweet crude closed up \$1.13 at \$36.20 a barrel, the highest price since before the Iraq war began, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

"The market is pretty close to fair value as is," Wren said. "The dollar's a little weaker, and you have oil that could hit \$40 a barrel. That's part of the reason why you'll see some churn in the next few weeks along with the earnings."

With earnings season now under way, General Motors Corp. reported profits of \$1.47

per share, easily beating the \$1.22 expected by Wall Street analysts. Its stock dropped 20 cents to close at \$53.87.

Advancing issues outpaced decliners by more than 3 to 2 on the New York Stock Exchange, where volume came to 1.72 billion shares in moderate trading, up from the 1.69 billion traded at the same point Friday.

The Russell 2000 index of smaller companies was up 7.57, or 1.3 percent, at 597.98.

Overseas, Japan's Nikkei stock average rose 0.6 percent. Britain's FTSE 100 closed down 0.4 percent, while France's CAC-40 and Germany's DAX index both finished down 0.8 percent.

World

Life & Style

Civet coffee: Strange brew in a time of SARS

By CHRIS BRUMMITT
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—SARS fears have stopped the Chinese from eating civet cats. But that hasn't turned off others from sipping the strangest of brews—one they insist is made from coffee beans eaten, partly digested and then excreted by the weasel-like animals.

The story goes like this: Civets live in the foliage of plantations across Southeast Asia. These fussy foragers pick the best and ripest coffee berries. Enzymes in their digestive system break down the flesh of the fruit before the animals expel the bean.

Workers collect beans from the plantation floor, wash away the dung and roast them to produce a unique drink that devotees might say is good to the last dropping.

Skeptics, though, dismiss it all as a weird and unverifiable marketing gimmick.

Still in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, the owner of three fashionable cafes, Agus Susanto, sells what he claims is a mix of regular beans and those that have passed through civets. The blend and the cafes are both called "Kopi Luwak"—in English: "Civet Coffee."

"Our coffee has a strong taste and an even stronger aroma," Susanto said by telephone from his factory in central Java.

In Vietnam, now the world's second-largest regular coffee grower, a blend supposedly containing some civet beans is produced by the Trung Nguyen company under the "Weasel Coffee" brand.

In the Philippines, the Old Manila Coffee House used to sell a civet brew, but supplies have dwindled over the years, said Ellen Tuason, its finance officer.

Draft copy of Harry Potter book auctioned

LONDON (AP)—A draft copy of the first Harry Potter adventure which incorrectly identified author J.K. Rowling sold at auction for \$2,642, the auctioneer said.

An anonymous bidder on Monday purchased the proof copy of "Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone," first published in 1997, the Bonhams auction house said. The proof incorrectly identifies the author as J.A. Rowling.

The book was released in the United States as "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone."

The sale generated interest from collectors worldwide because of the printing error on the title page.

Bonhams book specialist Gill Atkins said only 100 draft copies of the book were printed, "which is why the Harry Potter books have a high valuation."

"They were produced ahead of the first editions and were published in very small numbers and just circulated within the publishing industry," she said.



A cup of "Kopi Luwak" coffee is seen Friday, Jan. 16, 2004 at a Kopi Luwak coffee shop in Jakarta, Indonesia. AP

"Some of our guests said it was an aphrodisiac. It has a strong coffee smell, but different. There is a distinct odor and flavor," she said.

The beans are also marketed internationally. Several US-Internet based coffee traders claim to offer them for up to \$150 a pound, (\$325 a kilogram) making among the world's most expensive beverages.

However, many in Asia's coffee trade doubt whether the beans are truly produced in significant quantities, if at all.

"There are maybe a few bags here, a few bags there, but mostly it's just a myth," said Victor Mah, a Singaporean who has been selling coffee from

Southeast Asia for more than 25 years. Others just won't swallow the claims.

"I think it's a big scam," said Mark Hanusz, who spent eight months traveling Indonesia researching his book about coffee called "A Cup of Java."

In the past few weeks, authorities in southern China have exterminated thousands of civet cats on fears that they carry and spread the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus.

The World Health Organization also sees a potential relationship between the furry black and white animals and the disease that killed 774 people worldwide last year.

If that link is confirmed, consumer interest in civet coffee could plummet.

But in Jakarta, Susanto isn't worried. He expects to keep selling what he claims is 100 metric tons (110 tons) of civet coffee a month.

"There are many different kinds of civets in this world. The Indonesian ones are different from those in China," he said.

Henry Harmon, an American from Boston, Massachusetts who owns a chain of coffee shops in Indonesia, said he thinks the drink is for real, though he has no plans to introduce it in his stores.

"It has a nice romantic—well semi-romantic—twist to it, but I'd be worried about product liability lawsuits," Harmon said.

Rosenberg documentary in film festival

By DAVID GERMAIN
AP MOVIE WRITER

PARK CITY, Utah (AP)—Few filmmakers examining their family history in a documentary would find themselves in the thick of the Academy Awards race.

When your grandparents are Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, though, the subject resonates far outside the immediate family.

Ivy Meeropol's "Heir to an Execution" chronicles her effort to come to terms with the lives and deaths of her father's parents, executed as traitors in 1953 after being accused of relaying the secret of the atomic bomb to the Soviets.

"I grew up with this. It was always there and I knew about it because it was just part of our lives. But I didn't really feel the need to delve into it before," Meeropol, 35, said in an interview at the Sundance Film Festival, where "Heir to an Execution" is among 16 films competing for the top documentary honor. The film also is one of 12 up for Oscar consideration

in next Tuesday's nominations.

"Then I started to be curious about people who knew my grandparents, and family members, too, that I had never talked to. On the personal side, I wanted to know more about what happened, and I wanted to bring people along on that journey."

The film weaves archival footage, family home movies and Meeropol's conversations with her father, Michael Meeropol, his younger brother, Robert, other relatives and associates of the Rosenbergs.

A deeply personal, occasionally heartbreaking affair, "Heir to an Execution" paints a rich portrait of a devoted couple whose names came to symbolize Cold War hysteria.

While the film humanizes the Rosenbergs, it does not lionize them. The Meeropols are convinced Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were railroaded, yet the film makes clear that the family believes Julius may have been a spy and that Ethel likely would have been aware of her husband's activities.

In the 1970s, her father and uncle crusaded to reopen the case, convinced

their parents were entirely innocent, and Ivy Meeropol grew up with the same conviction. But government documents released in the mid-1990s caused the family to reevaluate whether Julius Rosenberg might have been trading secrets to the Soviets.

"I (agree) with the film," said Michael Meeropol, who came to Sundance for his daughter's premiere. "I think the film has done a really good job of identifying the legitimacy of accepting ambiguity and uncertainty."

"I'm willing to live with that," said Meeropol, 60, who was 10 when his parents went to the electric chair at Sing Sing. "I can make a fairly good case that the government's documents are disinformation and therefore should be disregarded, or I can make a fairly good case that it's legitimate, and my father is the person in those documents."

Archival footage includes compassionate statements from Anne and Abel Meeropol, supporters of the Rosenbergs who stepped forward to adopt the two boys after the executions.



By JIM SHEA
The Hartford Courant

It's not the cold, it's the stupidity

Cold enough for you? I'm sorry, but is there a stupider question in the entire world?

I mean, have you ever heard anyone respond:

Actually, I'm really hoping the temperature drops another 40 degrees and the wind picks up.

I think the reason so many people greet each other in such a dimwitted manner is because the brain gets all iced up during cold spells.

What happens is frigid air chills the outer skull while also entering the inner head through the nose, mouth and, in some cases, ears.

After a while, the blood turns slushy; brain cells become stiff; frost forms on the synapses. These changes produce brain numbing, followed by dumbing, followed by the question:

Is it cold enough for you?

I suppose I should point out that I base my theory on the cold-weather correlation between IQ and windchill not so much on hard evidence as upon keen observation.

For example, have you ever noticed that the majority of people who ask if it is cold enough for you are almost never wearing a warm hat?

Or that even in relatively moderate temperatures those lacking natural insulation up top—hair—are still prone to posing the moronic inquiry?

(This may also shed new light on the real reason the follicularly disenfranchised favor hats. Perhaps vanity has nothing to do with it. Perhaps they wear hats just so they can keep up.)

Of course, just because one is well-haired and warm-hatted does not guarantee immunity from brain icing.

I, for instance, have been known to ask the cold-enough-for-you question when the heated seats in my car are on the fritz, although for the life of me I don't understand why.

Anyway, what I think is needed to legitimize my brain-icing/cold-enough-for-you theory is a control-group study.

Here, I'm thinking TV weather personas, who I believe are more prone to brain icing than the general public.

This is because, early in their careers, TV weather personas spend a lot of time standing outdoors pointing out that it is raining or snowing or downright cold.

In turn, this explains why they are always so full of such obvious advice as:

"It's really cold out, so dress warm."

If you suspect you are coming down with a case of the cold-enough-for-you question, it is important to defrost your brain. This should be done slowly. The best method is to submerge your head—take your hat off first—in a bucket of lukewarm water until clear stuff begins running out of your nose and you are able to form compound sentences.

Remember, never, ever stick your head into a microwave.

Oh, and for the record, it's cold enough for me.

Serkis on playing Gollum in 'Rings'

By COLLEEN LONG
AP WRITER

NEW YORK (AP)—Andy Serkis crouches on the hotel room couch, his deep blue eyes narrowing as he hisses his famous line from "The Lord of The Rings" trilogy ... "My precioussss."

Serkis looks more like a musician than an actor with wild black hair, jeans, a maroon T-shirt and blue hooded sweatshirt. But then he grins and the rock star disappears, replaced by that creepy little computerized creature, Gollum.

"They copied my facial expressions to make him as real as possible," Serkis said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "We wanted the character to be very rooted, both emotionally and physically, so what you're looking at on screen is how I acted the part during filming."

The resemblance is strange for him, too; Serkis said he sees his father in Gollum, and his 3-year-old son in Gollum's eager-to-please alter-ego, Smeagol. "My dad wasn't too happy about that," he joked.

The process of creating the character was so involved and complex that Serkis wrote a book about it: "Gollum: How We Made Movie Magic," (Houghton Mifflin, \$9.95).

The British actor details how he developed Gollum's voice after watching his cat cough up a hair ball, and the difficulties of acting out a computer-generated part. (For the record, the scratchy, pitiful voice in the movie is 100 percent Serkis.)

In Tolkein's mythology, Gollum was once a Hobbit-like creature named Smeagol. After discovering the One Ring, the evil object transforms him into a withered, hissing wretch, and he spends years searching for it after the hobbit Bilbo Baggins takes it from his lair.

Gollum is tortured by the wizard Sauron's forces until he reveals Baggins' name; he later returns to reclaim the ring from



THE
LORD OF THE RINGS
THE RETURN OF THE KING

Frodo, but ends up leading Frodo and Sam to Mount Doom.

During much of the filming, Serkis wore a skin-tight white suit while slithering through the rocky New Zealand landscape as he acted alongside Frodo (Elijah Wood) and Sam (Sean Astin).

Director Peter Jackson would shoot the three in a scene together, then re-shoot with Serkis doing Gollum's voice off camera, and lastly a shot of just the backdrop.

"We knew what the objective was with the character, but we

didn't know exactly how we were going to get there, and what ideas would work," Serkis said. "The acting process, too, was so complex because he's a living manifestation of what the ring does to someone."

Originally Jackson thought he'd use the scenes with Serkis off-camera, but the energy was often stronger with Serkis on screen, so the animators painted Gollum over those shots.

"I acted Gollum. I didn't approach that part any different than I did other parts. It wasn't

just me standing in a room doing a voice," said Serkis, whose previous screen credits were mostly British movies such as "24 Hour Party People."

Later, Serkis would act scenes wearing special suits that allowed him to control Gollum's movements on a computer screen. By the end of the four years of filming, Serkis was able to shoot the actual scene wearing a specific suit that would allow animators to translate his movements to Gollum.

The process wasn't easy.

Secretary: Pope didn't OK Gibson film

By VICTOR L. SIMPSON
AP WRITER

VATICAN CITY (AP)—Pope John Paul II's longtime secretary denied Tuesday that the pontiff ever offered his endorsement of Mel Gibson's controversial biblical epic "The Passion of the Christ," disputing reports attributed to the producers.

John Paul was said to have given his approval after a screening in his apartment in early December by saying, "It is as it was." The quote received widespread publication around the world.

Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, secretary to John Paul throughout his 25-year papacy, confirmed the pope had seen the film.

"But I told the producers the Holy Father did not make any judgment, because he does not make judgments of that kind," Dziwisz told The Associated Press. "He said nothing of the kind."

Dziwisz's denial was first reported by the Catholic News Service, which is affiliated with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. It said he had met with co-producer Steve McEveety and with assistant director Jan Michelini after the screening, but had not passed on the pope's judgment.

The papal secretary rarely speaks to the press; his remarks were an apparent indication of concern over alleged papal endorsement of a film that has

stirred controversy for months before it has been viewed by the general public.

The film, on the last hours of Jesus' life, is scheduled to open Feb. 25—Ash Wednesday on the Roman Catholic calendar.

After a series of screenings in Rome, several top Vatican officials praised the film and rejected complaints by some Jewish leaders who say the film suggests the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion.

Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos said after a screening in September that "I would like all Catholic priests in the world to see this film. I hope that all Christians can see it, everyone in the world."

Two screenings were held for

John Paul so the ailing 83-year-old pontiff did not have to sit through the entire production, church officials said.

The Vatican press office, which usually states the pope's official positions, repeatedly has declined to confirm or deny the alleged papal endorsement.

"This office never comments on the private activities of the pope," Joaquin Navarro-Valls, John Paul's official spokesman, said Tuesday.

The papal secretary was the first official to comment publicly on whether the pope made the remark.

Gibson has defended his work as faithful to the Gospels. He said it is intended to "inspire, not offend."

Serkis often felt frustrated and isolated from the other cast members, though he admits some of it was his doing.

"I wanted him to be isolated, because he really is cut off from everyone because of his addiction to the ring," he said. "So I did a lot of stuff on my own and that ended up making me feel more separated."

Serkis said all the talk about the cast members having a spectacular time is mostly true, and he does miss New Zealand. But he's glad the journey has come to an end.

"It's time to move on. I want to experience other

things, I spent so long on this film, and it will always be a part of me, precious," he said with a huge smile.

The book is also filled with snippets written by the animators, film director Peter Jackson, and script co-writer Fran Walsh.

Serkis said he wrote the book to be sort of a guide for future films, but also to

have closure on the character.

"It's like my diary of the past four years, which was such an unusual journey," he said. "I was the strand that held Gollum together, the emotional strand. But the animators, directors, they were the pearls."



Serkis

Stone closes set for 'Alexander'

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP)—Oliver Stone has summoned 20 armor-clad elephants and hundreds of actors to central Thailand to shoot scenes for his latest epic, "Alexander."

But apparently the writer-director doesn't want anyone else around.

"It's a closed set," said publicist Michael Singer. "It's to allow the production to go ahead without distractions."

With few exceptions, the media has been barred from visiting the set of the film about Alexander the Great, which stars Colin Farrell as the Macedonian conqueror.

Furthermore, cast members said they'd been warned not to take their own photographs of a battle scene being filmed this week in Lopburi province, 71 miles north of Bangkok.

"We've been warned that if Oliver sees us with a camera, he'll storm over, stomp all over the camera and personally escort you off the set," said an actor who asked not to be identified.

The team is shooting scenes in which Alexander confronts an Indian king, Porus, during his invasion of India in 325 B.C. More filming is planned in northeastern Ubon Ratchathani province in coming weeks.

Filming also took place on location in Morocco and at studios near London since the production began last September. The film is scheduled for release in November.

"Alexander" co-stars Angelina Jolie, Anthony Hopkins and Val Kilmer. It was unknown whether any of the stars will be filming in Thailand.

Director Oliver Stone, leaving a New York hotel on Nov. 19, 2000. AP



PASSAGES

Willingham dies at 72

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. (AP)—Noble Willingham, who worked steadily as a supporting actor over the last 30 years and left his role as a saloon owner on the series "Walker, Texas Ranger" to run for Congress, has died. He was 72.

Willingham died Saturday at his Palm Springs home, his manager, Sandy Josephs, said Tuesday. He died of natural causes, according to the Riverside County coroner's office.

He played barkeep C.D. Parker on "Walker, Texas Ranger" from 1993-99. His character was a former Texas Ranger who provided advice on cases to Ranger Cord Walker, played by series star Chuck Norris.

Willingham was the 2000 Republican nominee for a congressional seat in eastern Texas, but lost to Democrat Max Sandlin.

Willingham's "distinctive voice and warmly gruff manner" helped him bring authority figures to life, Josephs said.

He was among the local Texans hired when "The Last Picture Show" (1971) was filmed on location by director Peter Bogdanovich. His other film credits included "Paper Moon" (1973); "Chinatown" (1974); "Good Morning, Vietnam" (1987); "City Slickers" (1991); "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective" (1994) and "Up Close and Personal" (1996).

A native of Mineola, Texas, Willingham pursued his dream of acting after earning a master's degree at Baylor University and working as a teacher.

He returned to acting after his failed congressional campaign, filming "Blind Horizon" with star Val Kilmer in 2002. The movie is scheduled to be released this year.

'Idol' has best debut of season

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Fox's "American Idol" hit impressively high ratings notes in its third season premiere.

The talent show drew 29 million viewers Monday, the best start for any series in the 2003-04 season, according to preliminary Nielsen Media Research figures released Tuesday by Fox.

Fox also enjoyed a solid debut for "My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiance," a reality series that debuted after "American Idol." The new series was watched by 19.6 million viewers.

Final figures for both series,

which helped Fox win the night among total viewers as well as advertiser-coveted younger ones, will be available Wednesday.

"American Idol," which has produced three instant music stars in Kelly Clarkson, Ruben Studdard and Clay Aiken, was expected to provide a boost for the struggling network.

Gail Berman, Fox's entertainment president, recently called the show Fox's "engine" and said it's as important to the network as "Friends" is to NBC or "Survivor" is to CBS.

Last May's finale, in which

Studdard narrowly beat out Aiken in nationwide voting, drew more than 38 million viewers.

This year, an estimated 80,000 aspiring stars applied to be on the show. Contestants are again being judged by Paula Abdul, Randy Jackson and Simon Cowell, with Ryan Seacrest back as host.

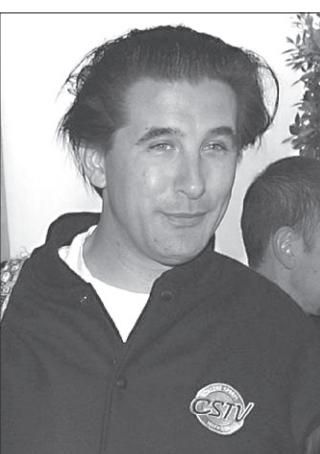
"My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiance" features a woman out to convince her family she's serious about a questionable mate to win a prize. She's unaware that her "fiance" is, in fact, an actor making the task as difficult as possible.

Baldwin fights for college sports program

BINGHAMTON, N.Y. (AP)—A state university wrestling program that faces the budget ax is getting some help from William Baldwin.

The star of movies including "Backdraft" and "Sliver" has joined the fight to save the sport at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

The program has been targeted for elimination by university president Lois DeFleur as part of an attempt to save money. New York state is facing a \$5.1 billion deficit, and all state institutions



have been told to hold the line on spending.

The 40-year-old Baldwin—who wrestled at the university nearly 20 years ago—told WNBF radio in Binghamton that he and other supporters of the program have offered to raise funds to keep it going.

DeFleur said that during a recent meeting at the university, wrestling supporters made threats to college officials. But Baldwin told the radio station that DeFleur is misrepresenting the facts and efforts to save the program will continue.

Crooner Dean says Sara Lee dropped him

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—Legendary country crooner Jimmy Dean says the Sara Lee Corp. has dropped him as spokesman for the sausage company he founded more than three decades ago.

In a statement Monday, the 75-year-old multimillionaire says the Chicago-based maker of food, apparel and household products told him last year he no longer meets the company's marketing needs.

"The company told me that

they were trying to attract the younger housewife, and they didn't think I was the one to do that," Dean said in an interview. "I think it's the dumbest thing. But you know, what do I know?"

Julie Ketay, a spokeswoman for Sara Lee, said Monday that the company chose not to renew Dean's contract in May because the "brand was going in a new direction" that demanded a shift in marketing.

"We're focusing more on the product, not the person. Our consumers want convenience and great taste," Ketay said.

Sara Lee, Dean said, pays him an undisclosed amount for the use of his name, his likeness and his marketing participation in the Jimmy Dean product line. The company will still retain rights to his name and image, but it has reduced its payments to reflect its dismissal of Dean as the line's spokesman, Dean said.

Daughter mourns sale of home sweet home

By AVIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: I am in my 30s. I have not lived at home for 10 years; however, my parents sold the family home a few months ago, and I got very depressed when the sale became final.

My parents are in excellent health and live nearby. I am grieving, but I don't know why. My brothers and sisters and I grew up in that house, and we all feel a real sense of loss.

Maybe I'm having trouble getting used to the idea that time marches on and that all good things eventually end. Also, we're not getting together as often as we used to when we gathered at the house.

Can you suggest anything that will help me move along with my life? I want to focus on positive things and not look back for something that is gone.

GRIEVING FOR THE HOUSE

DEAR GRIEVING: The house was a symbol of your childhood. Now that it is gone, in a sense, so is your childhood. That may be a sad thought, but dwell on the positive. You have the rest of your life to live as an adult, with all the guaranteed rights and privileges that go along with it. If the family isn't gathering as often as it used to, consider starting new family traditions. Perhaps it's time for you and your siblings to trade off hosting holiday celebrations. Look at it this way: Nothing stays the same. Sometimes it gets better and better.

DEAR ABBY: I am a 24-year-old mother of a beautiful 5-year-old daughter, "Donna." I was married to her father for a year. When we divorced, Donna and I relocated 600 miles away to move in with my new boyfriend. A year later, I realized that the relationship was going nowhere, so Donna and I returned to our hometown.

Four months later, I met "Gary." We've been together for two years now. Gary loves Donna and she loves him. However, he recently told me he has no intention of marrying me. (And like an idiot, I continue to let him spend the night.)

Donna cries when Gary and I fight, and now I'm afraid that if I leave him, Donna will have major abandonment issues and not trust men when she is older.

I know I am not being fair to my daughter, and I worry about whether it's too late to make things better for her. I don't want to give up dating for good, but I feel hatred toward Gary every time I think about how easy it would be for him to pack up and never see us again. I hate the fact that I let this happen and that there's nothing I can do to change it. I love Donna and would give my life for her, but I am confused because if I didn't have her, I would have no problem with my relationship with Gary. It just seems so unfair.

Will my daughter resent me for the selfish decision I have made?

MIXED-UP MOM IN MISSISSIPPI

DEAR MOM: That remains to be seen. As it stands, you have had a flash of insight about your lifestyle and your responsibilities as a mother.

The time has come to start thinking like a mature adult. That means putting your daughter first and not rushing into intimate relationships. If I were you, I'd consider taking a sanity break from men for a while. When you resume, do not introduce your daughter to the people you're dating until you are sure they are sincere and honorable.

P.S. Since Gary has no intention of guaranteeing a stable future for you and your child, end the relationship. This may seem harsh, but it will be less painful in the long run.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Abby shares more than 100 of her favorite recipes in two booklets: "Abby's Favorite Recipes" and "More Favorite Recipes by Dear Abby." Send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$10 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby—Cookbooklet Set, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included in price.)

Boxers wanted for international bouts



Local boxers interested in being exposed to international competition finally have a chance at fulfilling that goal.

According to a press release, the Philmar Pacific International Promotions, LTD. will promote international bouts this February 28 at the Garapan Central Park.

Dubbed the Thrilla in Saipan, the event will not only feature fighters from the CNMI, but also topnotch

contenders from Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Amateur boxing will serve as preliminary fights leading up to the main event.

The event is scheduled to get underway at 6pm and will last until all fights have concluded.

The release also added that the event will assist with revenue and tourism in Saipan.

For more information or to register, please contact Al Taitano at 234-1734 (home), 234-8607/09 (work), or 483-2969 (cellular). (Shan Seman)

RODDICK

From Page 28

and fourth-seeded Amelie Mauresmo advanced in straight sets. Mauresmo has lost only three games in two matches and spent less than 90 minutes on court.

The 33-year-old Agassi, an eight-time Grand Slam winner, hasn't dropped a set in the tournament. He converted six of eight break point chances and didn't concede one.

Agassi took the first set in 18 minutes and Berdych did not win a game for 27 minutes, until he held serve for the first time in five attempts to close the gap to 2-1 in the second set.

"Today felt really good. I think there was a lot of quality ball striking going on, from both sides," said Agassi, who has won his last 23 consecutive matches at Melbourne Park.

The former No. 1 had never played the young Czech before, making it hard to formulate a game plan to counter his youth and speed.

"It's hard," he said. "I prefer playing anybody in their late 20s or on," Agassi said.

Berdych had more winners than Agassi, 27-23, and had more aces, 12-7, but was much more inconsistent, committing 35 unforced errors to just 10 for Agassi.

Agassi next plays Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, a 7-5, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 winner over Slovakian Karol Beck.

Roddick moved into a show-down with fellow American Taylor Dent, seeded 27th, who overcame Juan Ignacio Chela of Argentina 3-6, 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (4), 7-5 in 3:30.

Dent, frustrated after mixing 83 winners with 77 unforced errors, stood behind the baseline and screamed "Yeah" to punctuate his match when Chela netted a backhand volley on match point.

Roddick said Dent was on the verge of making it in the big time and "it's a big match for me."

"He's got everything. He can break serve, he can serve big," Roddick said. "I think it's just a matter of it coming together for him ... hopefully he'll delay it for a couple more days."

Frenchman Nicolas Escude,

11 tournaments slated so far by BANMI

By MARK RABAGO
REPORTER



Eleven basketball tournaments and still counting.

That is the number of on-island hoops competitions projected by Basketball Association of the Northern Mariana Islands president Rufino Aguon in 2004.

Aguon said the Commonwealth's official basketball calendar begins late this month or early February when the Mobil Oil Marianas 3rd Annual Co-Ed Invitational Basketball Tournament kicks off.

Pacific Development Inc. will be this year's defending champion after it nipped Mobil Oil in an exciting overtime finals thriller in 2003.

Also expected to start this February are the Masters Basketball League 40-and-over tournament and the Budweiser Men's Island-wide Basketball League. Verizon Typhoons and Ol'Aces are the defending champions, respectively, in the aforementioned cage fests.

Come March, BANMI would then organize the Island-wide Village Youth Basketball League with the Chalan Kanoa Saints as the defending champions and the 2004 season of the Inter-Hotel and Restaurant Basketball League, where Keeraku Restaurant is the reigning champ.

Following the Airport Olympics and the Pacific Rim



MARK RABAGO

Shiho Kashiwagi and the defending champions Pacific Development Inc. of the Mobil Marianas Co-ed Invitational Basketball Tournament kick off the year for BANMI.

Tournaments on May, BANMI would then get ready for the 18-and-under Saipan Rotary Club Youth Basketball League beginning in June.

The 18-and-under Ol'Aces team is the defending champion this year and will once again go all out to score a rare back-to-back in the Commonwealth's most prestigious junior basketball tournament.

August would be another busy month for BANMI and Aguon as the association would be staging the 35-and-over Mas-

ters Basketball League and the Inter-Government Basketball League during the said month.

Old Aces will try to build on last year's success when it dethroned Verizon in the 35-and-over cage league, while defending champion Tinian will take on all comers from Saipan in the 2004 edition of the government cage league.

October then hosts BANMI's last tournament of the year, so far as its calendar indicate, according to Aguon. The month would have the inaugural Gato-

rade Basketball League taking center stage with the islands' top teams duking it out for the title of best team in the Commonwealth.

As always, the Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium would once again be the workhorse for this year's BANMI tournaments. Aguon said most if not all scheduled BANMI events would take place in the Susupe venue with the exception of the IVYBL, which will probably take place on the open courts scattered around Saipan's villages.

SPORTS BRIEFS

NMITA meeting this Saturday

The Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association has scheduled a general membership meeting this Saturday, January 24, 2pm at the American Memorial Park tennis courts.

The meeting is expected to tackle the leadership vacuum that came in the wake of Jeff Race, declining the 2004 presidency.

Other NMITA positions to be filled out are vice-president, secretary, treasurer and board members.

For more information about the NMITA general

membership meeting, please contact Race at 322-5652 or 483-5652 or e-mail him at race@saipan.com. (Mark Rabago)

Power Golf Club Ace of the Month this Saturday

Power Golf Club will hold its inaugural Ace of the Month tourney this coming Saturday, January 24, at the Marianas Country Club. Tee off time is 7am.

Power Golf Club would like to remind all members and newcomers to come prior to tee off time this Saturday for the pairings. Score to beat is in none other than

the 4-under 68 registered by Ben Norita. For more information, please contact Sasaki Oliver at 322-9265.

SEDA calls on players to sign up

SEDA has set a captains meeting on January 25 at the Pacific Gardenia's Sunset Bar & Grill, 7 pm.

It is also reminding participants that the deadline for the submission of sign up sheets is this Sunday, January 18. All dues must also be paid before the January 25 captains' meeting.

The awards banquet for 2003 season has been scheduled for February 1, a Sunday, from 10:30am to 6pm at Charlie's at

the Pacific Islands Club. The 2004 SEDA season will begin on February 8.

For more information, please contact Gary at 236-2347. (Mark Rabago)

Little League deadline

The Saipan Little League Baseball Inc. board of directors is reminding all prospective 2004 teams that the deadline to submit all pertinent documents and entrance fees is Wednesday, January 28.

Fees and documents can be submitted to league treasurer Martin Pangelinan by calling him at 234-6076. (Shan Seman)

122 CONFIRMED

From Page 28

The official rules for both runs are as follows:

All registered runners must be checked-in prior to the start time; all runners must remain on the ocean side of Beach Road throughout the course; all runners must also remain on the shoulder of the road within coned areas.

Running anywhere else may result in a disqualification.

An official will be stationed at each turn-around marker for check-

off. Runners not checked off will be disqualified from the competition.

The 10k turn-around is located across the Saipan Bowling Center in San Jose. The turn-around marker for the Half Marathon is at the San Antonio Beach Park just past the Pacific Islands Club.

Male and female divisions have also been set up for participants who are under the age of 15 years old, 15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50 and up.

Awards will be given to the top three overall male and female finishers. Runners placing

in the overall category will not qualify for awards in their respective age division. The male and female first place finishers in each age division will each go home with an award.

The meeting also revealed that the main sponsors for the event are DFS Galleria Saipan and Pacific Trading Co. Other sponsors include Dai-ichi Saipan Beach Hotel, Hyatt Regency Saipan, and Pacific Development Inc.

Johnson added that the two hotels and PDI have confirmed assisting at aid stations.

The first aid station will be situated across the Century Insurance Building in Garapan; the second just by the World War II Tank across Quarter Master Road; the third at the 10K turn-around; the fourth in front of the Town House Shopping Center in Susupe; and the fifth at the Half Marathon turn-around.

The event is hosted by the MVA and the NMITFF.

For more information, please contact Johnson at 664-3200, Elias Rangamar at 664-2500, or Kurt Barnes at 234-5498 ext. 1348.



So far, 11 tournaments slated by BANMI

Eleven basketball tournaments and still counting.

27

Saipan Tribune Sports

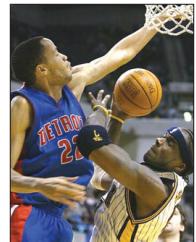
28 THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2004

SAIPAN TRIBUNE

O'Neal's Pacers stop Pistons' 13-game winning streak

Jermaine O'Neal had 28 points and 15 rebounds to help the Indiana Pacers snap the Detroit Pistons' 13-game winning streak Tuesday with an 81-69 victory.

25



122 confirmed for Half Marathon/10K

Race orientation tomorrow

By SHAN SEMAN
REPORTER

A total of 122 competitors, mostly from Japan, have confirmed participating in the upcoming Saipan Half Marathon/10K Fun Run, which will take place this Saturday, January 24.

Off the 122 runners, 79 will see action in the 23rd Annual Half Marathon while 43 will slug it out for supremacy in the 18th Annual 10K Fun Run.

Those figures were released yesterday during a meeting between the Marianas Visitors Authority and Northern Mariana Islands Track and Field Federation at the MVA office in San Jose.

According to Ed Johnson of MVA, over 50 percent of the total number of participants are from Japan.

"We were working closely with our offices in Japan and Korea, and as of today [January 21], more than 50 percent are from Japan," he said. "Majority from Japan are above 50 years old and have participated in this event for 10-plus years. It is a well known event, formerly known as the MVA Buffalo Fun Run, so runners from Japan are pretty familiar with it."

Prior to the event, all participants are encouraged to attend a race orientation tomorrow, January 23, at the MVA parking lot. A briefing for all non-English speaking runners will be held at 4:30pm while English-speaking competitors will have their orientation



SHAN SEMAN

Organizers of the upcoming Saipan Half Marathon/10K Championships strike a pose for a photo during a meeting yesterday at the Marianas Visitors Authority conference room. Standing from left to right are Elias Rangamar and Robin Eugenio of the Northern Mariana Islands Track and Field Federation, and Ed Johnson and Martin Duenas of the MVA. Sitting is NMITFF president Kurt Barnes.

at 5pm. MVA will also provide translators and account staff to handle payments of fees.

The fee required to compete in either

runs is \$30. However, the last day to register is Saturday between 4:30 and 5:15am during the pre-race check-in. Both races will then get underway at 5:

30am at the intersection of the American Memorial Park and Beach Road just north of the Department of Public Safety Garapan Substation. Runners

will work their way south along Beach Road and back track to the finish line, also located at the intersection.

See 122 CONFIRMED on Page 27

Roddick, Agassi win at Australian Open

By JOHN PYE
AP SPORTS WRITER



MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)—Top-ranked Andy Roddick and defending champion Andre Agassi breezed into the third round of the Australian Open by winning in straight sets Wednesday over Czech rivals.

Agassi had a 6-0, 6-2, 6-4 win over 18-year-old Tomas Berdych, closing with an ace in 1 hour 22 minutes. Roddick fired 20 aces and didn't lose a point on his first serve in the third set of a 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 win over Bohdan Ulihrach.

Roddick set up triple match point with a curling forehand winner down the line and finished it off in 1:13 with a booming first-serve winner.

Justine Henin-Hardenne, ranked No. 1 and winner at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in 2003, had a 6-1, 6-4 win over childhood friend Camille Pin of France in her second-round match,



Andre Agassi of the U.S. reacts after his second round win over Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic at the Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia, Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2004. Agassi won in straight sets 6-0, 6-2, 6-4.

See Roddick on Page 27

Youth Volleyball canceled as teams pull out

By SHAN SEMAN
REPORTER

Just last week, it seemed like everything was set for another thrilling season of youth volleyball action.

That, however, won't be the case as Division of Sports and Recreation staff Jovie Omar stated yesterday that officials have decided to cancel the Island-wide Youth Volleyball League 2004 season due to an insufficient number of teams participating.

Omar said that the Marianas High School Dolphins and the Kagman High School Ayayus pulled out of the competition after learning that it will coincide with another volleyball league that they've committed to. The other league is being coordinated by the Marianas Interscholastic Sports Association—the sports body for high schools. She also hinted but did not confirm that the Saipan Southern High School Manta Rays might have also pulled out to compete in the MISA league.



With the three teams withdrawing, the boys division was left with just one team—Shag. Only two teams remained in the girls' division—Chickas and the Grace Christian Academy Eagles—forcing officials to call the league off.

For the record, the league featured just one official result in 2004. Last Thursday, the defending champions Chickas were scheduled to battle the Eagles in the season-opener, but suited up just four players for the match, resulting in the Eagles winning via forfeit.

The league, normally held in November, was postponed several times towards the end of last year due to the same reason it was canceled. Earlier in the month, officials were positive as more teams signed up for competition. A total of 20 games were scheduled to take place in the girls' division while the boys' corner would've featured 12 matches in the regular season.